

Lee Friedlander

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The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D. C.; the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, Washington, D. C.; and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C., a Federal agency.

The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976

Lee Friedlander

The Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

December 11, 1976—February 20, 1977

The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976 is an unprecedented Bicentennial project originated by The Corcoran Gallery of Art. Eight eminent American photographers have been invited to spend extended periods—at least a month—in Washington, D. C. during 1975-1976 to photograph the city, its environs and people, as each was guided by his own vision. Thus we hoped to achieve a diversified documentation of a place and time. A selection of four prints by each artist is to be earmarked for exhibition at the Corcoran in the Tricentennial year 2076.

The participating artists, each shown separately, two at a time in four stages throughout the year 1976, are LEWIS BALTZ, San Francisco; JOE CAMERON, Washington, D. C.; ROBERT CUMMING, Los Angeles; ROY DECARAVA, New York City; LEE FRIEDLANDER, New York City; JOHN GOSSAGE, Washington, D. C.; JAN GROOVER, New York City; and ANTHONY HERMANDEZ, Los Angeles.

The artists were selected by Chief Curator Jane Livingston and Assistant Curator Frances Fralin. As organizers of this series of exhibitions they have been responsible for the complete task of scheduling and working with the artists at every stage of the project's long development, and for producing the eight catalogues. I wish to express my special appreciation to them and to each of the eight artists for their unstinting cooperation.

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D. C.; the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, Washington, D. C.; and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C., a Federal agency.

Roy Slade, *Director*

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Lee Friedlander is one of the most important photographers of his generation. He is, I think, undoubtedly the most experienced in the present program—both in terms of photographs taken and participation in shows and publications. Thus, it is no accident that this exhibition is the largest of the eight, with fifty-two photographs, and the most varied. We see distinct groups of images; it can be regarded as a sort of mini-encapsulation of the various styles of a formidable career. There is no single “look” or class of images we associate exclusively with Lee Friedlander: his TV sets of 1962, the jazz musicians, the empty motel rooms, are no less well known than the party scenes or monuments or raw, often grimly funny street scenes. There is, however, a style that by now we recognize instantly.

Some debate has taken place with respect to Lee Friedlander's place in recent photography as to whether he represents a break from the more or less documentary photography of the 20's, 30's and 40's into the more “formal” photographic esthetic of the 60's, or whether it is contrarily a *denial* of the earlier “artisticness” of Secessionist and much other eminent photography throughout the first half of the century, turning instead toward a new “factualness.” Oddly enough, Friedlander seems to do both these things. Nevertheless, one would have to place him nearer Walker Evans, for instance, than Edward Weston. The complexity of the issue is demonstrated by the fact that I was struck in seeing Friedlander's recently published *Monuments* book on a closeness in spirit it seems to have to the document/survey photographs of O'Sullivan, Watkins et al.

For this project Lee Friedlander has made work which divides into seven groups. There are miscellaneous photographs of cityscape scenes, often with buildings under construction; a series of vertical images, fairly crowded in composition, representing trees or posts;

a more lush and “estheticized” group of pictures, also vertical in format and unusually densely organized, especially for Friedlander; a group depicting the Washington Monument in widely differing ways; several photographs of various statue monuments in D.C. (of the same general type as Friedlander's recently published book of monuments in towns and cities across the United States); some elegant, lush and rather anomalous views of domestic interiors; and, finally, a series of modern sculptures in outdoor settings, primarily surrounding the Hirshhorn Museum on the Mall.

The overall character of the exhibition is significantly more *esthetic* than most of Friedlander's work. He remarked in this regard that the city itself determined the relatively pronounced seductiveness of these images—but certainly other photographers in this series, Anthony Hernandez or Lewis Baltz particularly, didn't see this side of Washington, D.C. Friedlander chose to work in areas—the Mall and Dumbarton Oaks, for instance—which epitomize the most ingratiating side of the city. What he manages to do is present a certain dramatization of these subjects by focusing on new elements of familiar territory and new juxtapositions.

The brilliance of Friedlander's technique is in the extent to which the formal elements of the photographs are made “invisible”: what we notice is *what* is photographed and not *how*. Friedlander seems to know how to do virtually everything available to straight photography. The spatially compressed shot; the use of obtrusive foreground elements to establish perspectival confusion; Cubist-like constructions; Impressionist-like all-over density; layered transparencies; “arbitrary” cropping—all these devices, and many more, are employed at will in these works. One never observes quite the degree of intensely close-up immersion in the subject that happens, for instance, in some

of John Gossage's photographs—Friedlander always leaves more distance, creates more breathing space around objects or areas, than the younger artist. But Friedlander's tendency in some of these works is nevertheless toward compoundedly rich and packed compositions. What makes the present show such a tour de force is that this attribute coexists with other, quite different developments. The group of photographs depicting sculptures is a significant departure in theme and in look. The interiors are equally startling in relation to the artist's earlier work.

The one consistent attribute in these photographs is the absence of particularized human presences. Even when clusters of people appear, they are as objects—clusters of small figures in the middle or background, or shadows of figures. It is the photographer's own presence we sense, but as a somehow anonymous force, leaving us to our own interpretive devices.

Jane Livingston



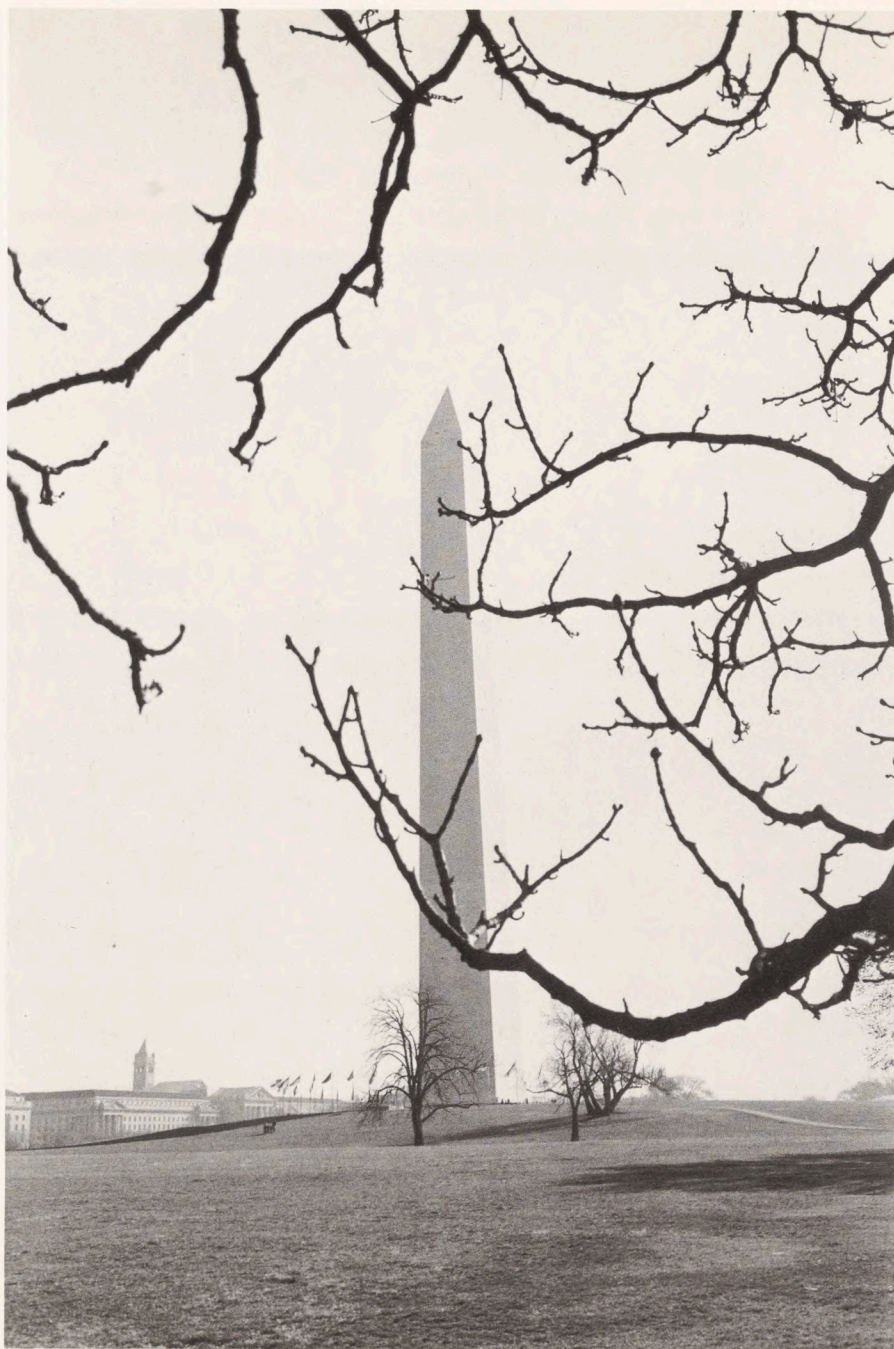


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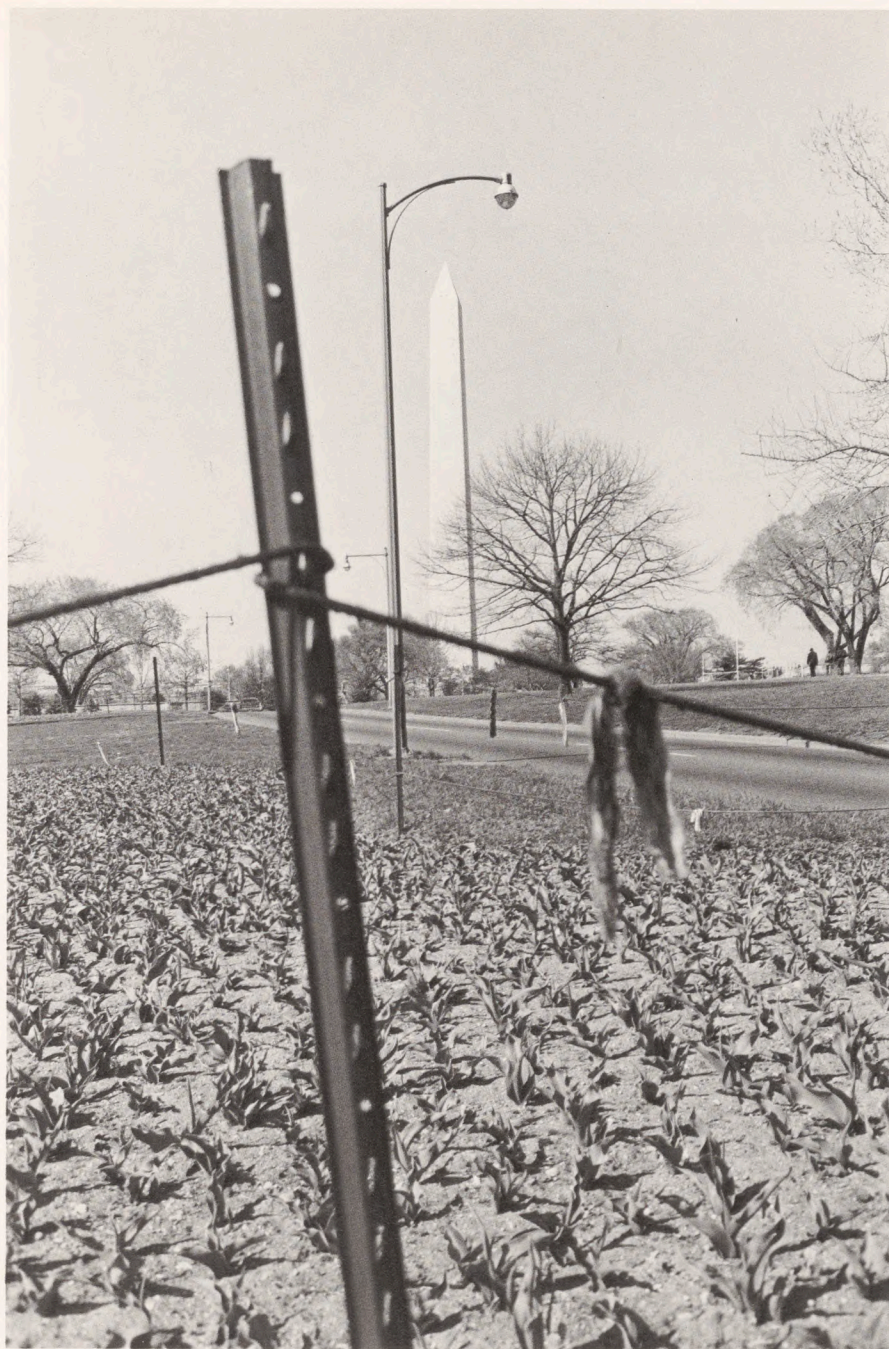








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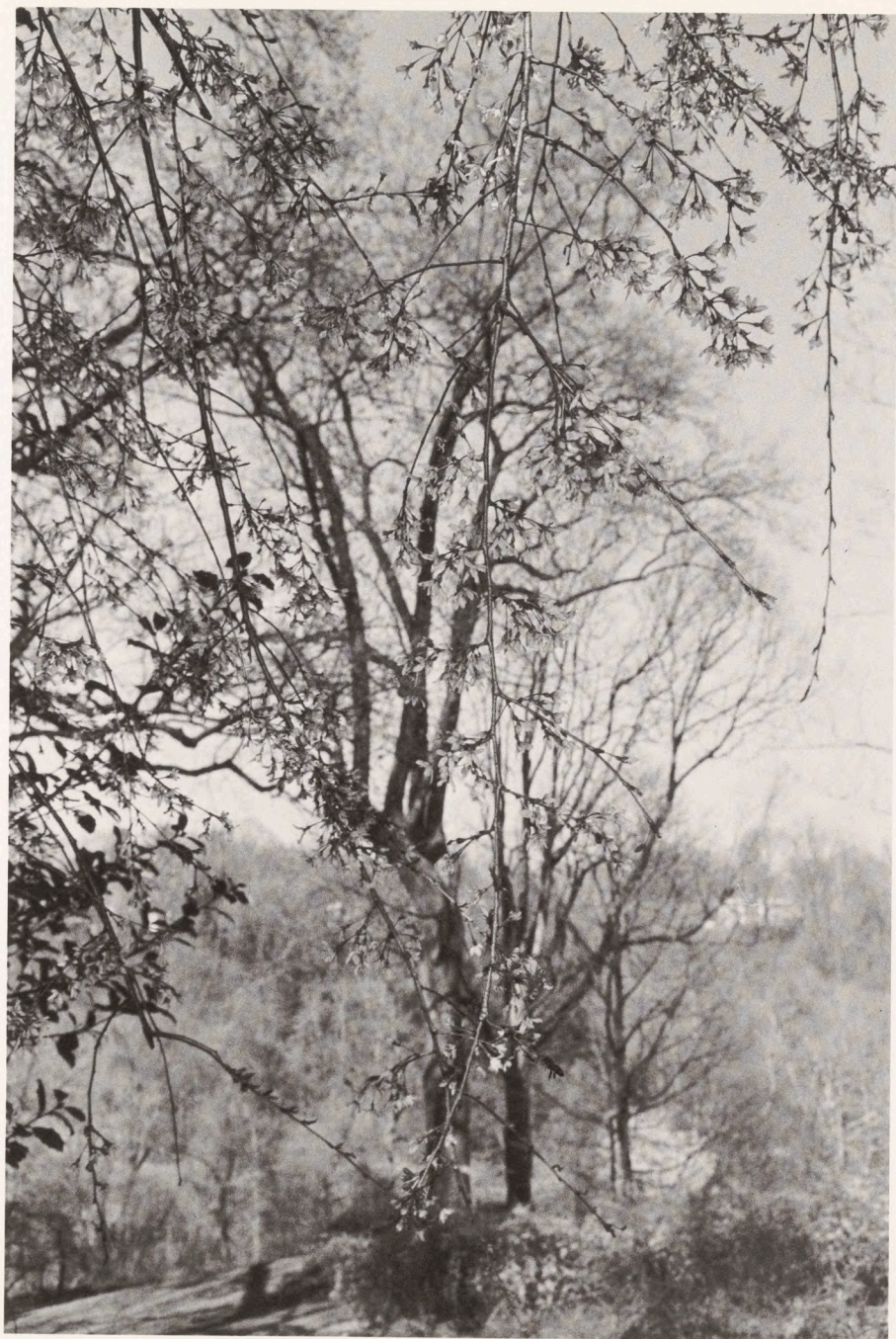












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Catalogue of the Exhibition

The exhibition consists of 52 photographs in seven groups: A, 1-10; B, 1-8; C, 1-6; D, 1-9; E, 1-8; F, 1-6; G, 1-5. All images are approximately 7½" x 11" on 11" x 14" photographic paper.

Lee Friedlander

Born Aberdeen, Washington, 1934.

Began photographing 1948.

Attended The Art Center in Los Angeles and studied with Edward Kaminski, 1953-55.

Received John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowships, 1960, 1962.

Taught University of Minnesota, 1966.

Taught University of California at Los Angeles, 1970.

Received an individual fellowship in photography from The National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C., 1972.

Lives New City, New York.

Individual Exhibitions

- 1963 International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.
- 1970 Garrick Fine Arts Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 1971 "Gatherings I Got Myself Invited To," Focus Gallery, San Francisco, California.
- 1972 Witkin Gallery, Inc., New York City.
"Gatherings," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
- 1973 Jefferson Place Gallery, Washington, D. C.
- 1974 The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
- 1975 Broxton Gallery, Los Angeles, California.
- 1976 Texas Center for Photographic Studies, Dallas, Texas.
"Portfolios by Lee Friedlander," The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Yajima/Galerie, Montreal, Quebec.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1963 "Photography 63/An International Exhibition," International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. Catalogue (text by Nathan Lyons).
- 1964 "The Photographer's Eye," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Catalogue.

- 1965 "Recent Acquisitions," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
- 1966 "Contemporary Photographs Since 1950," New York State Council on the Arts, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.
"Guggenheim Fellows Show," Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
"Contemporary Photographers Toward a Social Landscape," International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. Catalogue (edited by Nathan Lyons).
- 1967 "12 Photographers of the American Social Landscape," Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. Catalogue.
"The New Documents," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City. With Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand.
"Photography in the 20th Century," National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Catalogue (published by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York).
- 1968 "Photography and the City," Arts and Industries Building, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.
"Contemporary Photography," Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery of the University of California at Los Angeles. Catalogue (text by Robert Heinecken).
- 1969 "Photographs for Collectors," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
"The Camera and the Human Facade," Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.
"13 Photographers: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Photography," Pratt Institute, New York City.
- 1970 "Photography U.S.A.," U. S. Pavilion, Osaka World's Fair, Japan. (Organized by John Szarkowski.)
"Photographs for Sale," Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York.
- 1971 "New Photography U.S.A.," a traveling exhibition circulated by the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Catalogue (text by John Szarkowski).
- 1972 "Portrait of the Artist," Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Catalogue (text by John Walsh, Jr.).
- 1973 "Recent Acquisitions," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
- 1974 "American Masters," Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

Books by the Artist

Work from the Same House (in conjunction with Jim Dine), Trigram Press, London, 1969.

Self Portrait, Haywire Press, New City, New York, 1970.

Storyville Portraits (photographs by E. J. Bellocq discovered and printed by Friedlander), Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1970.

The American Monument, Eakins Press, New York City, 1976.

Portfolios by the Artist

Photographs by Lee Friedlander and Etchings by Jim Dine, Petersburg Press, London, 1969.

15 Photographs by Lee Friedlander, Double Elephant Press, New York City, 1973.

Photographs of Flowers, Haywire Press, New City, New York, 1975.

The American Monument (deluxe and special editions), Haywire Press, New City, New York, 1976.

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Camera. "John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellows in Photography 1937-1965," vol. 45, no. 4, April 1966, p. 5, illus. pp. 48-49.

Coleman, A. D. "Savage and Friedlander: Different Approaches," *New York Times*, November 26, 1972, Sect. 2, p. 23.

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Friedlander, Lee. "E. J. Bellocq—Storyville Portraits," *Camera*, vol. 50, no. 12, December 1971, pp. 4-13.

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Friedlander, Lee. "The Little Screens," *Harper's Bazaar*, no. 3015, February 1963, comment by Walker Evans pp. 127, 129; photographic essay pp. 126-129.

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Kronenberger, Louis, ed. *Quality: Its Image in the Arts*, a Balance House Book, Atheneum Publishers, New York City, 1969, text by Walker Evans p. 192; illus. p. 193.

Lyons, Nathan. "Photography '63: the Younger Generation," *Art in America*, vol. 51, no. 6, December 1963, p. 72; ill. p. 73.

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Perry, Huey. *Blaze Star My Life as Told to Huey Perry*, Praeger Publishers, Inc., New York City/Washington, D. C., 1974, illus. between pp. 146-147.

Richard, Paul. "Photography Times Three: Art All in All," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1974, Sect. B, pp. 1, 5; ill. p. 5.

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Schwartz, Sanford. (Witkin Gallery Exhibition Review), *Art International*, vol. XVII, no. 2, February 1973, p. 60.

Soby, James Thrall. "Jazz," *Art in America*, vol. 51, no. 4, August 1963, p. 135; illus. pp. 134, 136-139.

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Szarkowski, John. "Study of Photography 'Touching the Broader Issues of Modern Art,'" *Art News*, vol. 72, no. 7, September 1973, pp. 54-55; ill. p. 54.

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